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## INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION PUBLISHED UNDER THE PATENT COOPERATION TREATY (PCT)

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| (51) International Patent Classification:<br><b>G06F</b>   | A2 | (11) International Publication Number:<br><b>WO 00/34843</b><br>(43) International Publication Date:<br><b>15 June 2000 (15.06.2000)</b> |
| (21) International Application Number:<br><b>PCT/US99/28660</b>  |    | <b>Published</b>   |
| (22) International Filing Date: <b>03 December 1999 (03.12.1999)</b>   |    |  |
| (30) Priority Data:<br><b>09/205,663 04 December 1998 (04.12.1998) US</b>  |    |  |
| (60) Parent Application or Grant<br>PRICELINE.COM INCORPORATED [/]; (O. WALKER, Jay,<br>S. [/]; (O. TEDESCO, Daniel, E. [/]; (O. JORASCH, James, A.<br>[/]; (O. HANCHUK, Walter, G. ; (O.  |    |  |
| <p>(54) Title: <b>METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR UTILIZING A PSYCHOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE IN A BUYER-DRIVEN COMMERCE SYSTEM</b></p> <p>(54) Titre: <b>PROCEDE ET SYSTEME D'UTILISATION D'UN QUESTIONNAIRE PSYCHOGRAPHIQUE DANS UN SYSTEME COMMERCIAL DETERMINE PAR L'ACHETEUR</b></p>  |    |  |
| <p>(57) Abstract</p> <p>A system for processing the sale of goods and services includes a psychographic questionnaire to gather and assess buyers' needs and purchasing patterns. In a buyer-driven commerce system, the questionnaire is used to gather information based upon which the buyer offer, or conditional purchase offer, may be changed to increase the likelihood of acceptance of the conditional purchase offer. In one embodiment, the results of the gathered information are used to determine actions that may be applied to the offer before the offer is distributed to potential sellers. In another embodiment, the results of the gathered information are used to determine actions that may be applied to the offer after the offer has been rejected by sellers. Actions may include, but are not limited to, proposing counter-offers of changed prices, proposing counter-offers of package deals, and subsidizing buyer offers.</p>   |    |  |
| <p>(57) Abrégé</p> <p>L'invention concerne un système de traitement de la vente de biens et de services, le système comprenant un questionnaire psychographique permettant de recueillir et d'évaluer les besoins et les habitudes d'achat des acheteurs. Dans un système commercial déterminé par l'acheteur, le questionnaire est utilisé pour recueillir des informations sur la base desquelles on peut modifier l'offre de l'acheteur ou l'offre d'achat conditionnelle pour augmenter les chances d'acceptation de l'offre d'achat conditionnelle. Dans un mode de réalisation, on utilise les résultats des informations recueillies pour déterminer des mesures à appliquer à l'offre avant de la présenter à des vendeurs potentiels. Dans un autre mode de réalisation, on utilise les résultats des informations recueillies pour déterminer les mesures à appliquer à l'offre après le rejet de l'offre par des vendeurs. Les mesures peuvent consister, de manière non exhaustive, à proposer des contre-offres consistant en une modification du prix, à proposer des contre-offres consistant en offres globales et à subventionner des offres d'acheteurs.</p> |    |  |

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| (21) International Application Number: <b>PCT/US99/28660</b><br>(22) International Filing Date: 3 December 1999 (03.12.99)<br><br>(30) Priority Data:<br>09/205,663 4 December 1998 (04.12.98) US   |    | (81) Designated States: AE, AL, AM, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BR, BY, CA, CH, CN, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DK, DM, EE, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, HR, HU, ID, IL, IN, IS, JP, KE, KG, KP, KR, KZ, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LV, MD, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, NO, NZ, PL, PT, RO, RU, SD, SE, SG, SI, SK, SL, TJ, TM, TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, UZ, VN, YU, ZA, ZW, ARIPO patent (GH, GM, KB, LS, MW, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZW), Eurasian patent (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European patent (AT, BE, CH, CY, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, IE, IT, LU, MC, NL, PT, SE), OAPI patent (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG). |
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| (54) Title: METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR UTILIZING A PSYCHOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE IN A BUYER-DRIVEN COMMERCE SYSTEM   |    |  |
|   |    |  |
| (57) Abstract   |    |  |
| <p>A system for processing the sale of goods and services includes a psychographic questionnaire to gather and assess buyers' needs and purchasing patterns. In a buyer-driven commerce system, the questionnaire is used to gather information based upon which the buyer offer, or conditional purchase offer, may be changed to increase the likelihood of acceptance of the conditional purchase offer. In one embodiment, the results of the gathered information are used to determine actions that may be applied to the offer before the offer is distributed to potential sellers. In another embodiment, the results of the gathered information are used to determine actions that may be applied to the offer after the offer has been rejected by sellers. Actions may include, but are not limited to, proposing counter-offers of changed prices, proposing counter-offers of package deals, and subsidizing buyer offers.</p> |    |  |

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**Description**

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CIP  
08/923,683

CIP  
08/889,319

CIP  
5,794,207

**METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR UTILIZING A  
PSYCHOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE  
IN A BUYER-DRIVEN COMMERCE SYSTEM**

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5      **Cross-Reference To Related Applications**

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10      This application is a continuation-in-part of U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 08/943,483, filed October 3, 1997, which is continuation-in-part of U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 08/923,683, filed September 4, 1997, which is a continuation-in-part of U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 08/889,319, filed July 8, 1997, which is a continuation-in-part of U.S. Patent No. 5,794,207, issued August 11, 1998, each of which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

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15      **Field of the Invention**

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20      The present invention relates generally to a system for processing the sale of goods and services and, more particularly, to a system and method for utilizing a psychographic questionnaire to efficiently increase the rate of sales in a buyer-driven commerce system based on an assessment of a potential buyer's needs and purchasing patterns.

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35      **Background of the Invention**

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25      Most systems for processing the sale of products are seller-driven, whereby the seller prices, packages, configures and offers the product for sale, and the buyer decides whether or not to accept the seller's offer. In a buyer-driven system, however, the buyer dictates the terms of the offer and one or more sellers decide whether or not to accept the offer. A "help wanted" advertisement, for example, is a buyer-driven inquiry since the employer is looking to locate and buy the services of a qualified employee. The inquiry is advertised to a large number of potential employees, who may respond by submitting their resumes to the prospective employer.

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30      Priceline.com, Incorporated of Stamford, CT is a merchant that has successfully implemented a buyer-driven system for the sale of products such as airline

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10 tickets and automobiles. Priceline.com utilizes a Conditional Purchase Offer (CPO) Management System, described in U.S. Patent No. 5,794,207 and International Application Number PCT/US97/15492, that processes Conditional Purchase Offers and/or Binding Conditional Purchase Offers (Binding CPOs) received from individual consumers. These CPOs contain one or more buyer-defined conditions for the purchase of goods or services, at a buyer-defined price. The Binding CPOs are typically guaranteed by a General Purpose Account, such as a debit or credit account, and thereby provide sellers with a mechanism for enforcing any agreement that may be reached with the consumer. The CPOs are provided by the CPO Management System to sellers, either directly or using seller-supplied rules, for individual sellers to either accept or reject. If a seller accepts a Binding CPO, the CPO Management System binds the buyer on behalf of the accepting seller, to form a legally binding contract.

15 Thus, the CPO Management System empowers individual consumers to obtain goods and services at a price set by the consumer. The CPO Management System provides numerous commercial advantages to sellers as well. For example, the CPO Management System permits individual sellers to effectively sell excess capacity when actual demand fails to meet forecasted demand. In particular, the CPO Management System provides an effective mechanism for sellers to be confident that if they accept a consumer's offer, the consumer will purchase the requested goods or services at the agreed-upon price, and not just use the information to ascertain the seller's underlying level of price flexibility, which, if known to a seller's competitors or customers, could dramatically impact the seller's overall revenue structure.

20 One of the major advantages of the CPO Management System as it applies to, e.g., the purchase of airline tickets through priceline.com, is its ability to tap into the market of "below-the-fare-line" consumers. This is a group of consumers who will not pay a published fare and will thus base their decisions to travel solely upon their offers being accepted. However, oftentimes these consumers' offers are found to be unacceptable and are subsequently rejected by the airlines. In an effort to make sales to these consumers, customer service representatives ("CSRs") at priceline.com may contact them and propose counter-offers, sometimes including supplemental products

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10 (e.g., "We can't sell you tickets for your offered price of \$300, but we *can* sell you  
tickets and a hotel room for the total price of \$500"). Unfortunately, this method of  
counter-offering is expensive and potentially cost-ineffective because counter-offer  
decisions cannot be made efficiently. Because the CPO Management System has only  
5 limited information available on which to base its counter-offer decisions (i.e., the CPO  
conditions), it is difficult to determine which consumers are likely to accept counter-  
offers and on what specific terms. Thus, there exists a need to leverage the asset-value  
inherent in rejected offers by efficiently making counter-offer decisions.

15 10 Another method used to make low offers acceptable is to create  
"package counter-offers" before consumers' offers are presented to and subsequently  
rejected by the sellers. Here, consumers are required to purchase product(s) in addition  
to their originally sought-after products for an adjusted total price. When an additional  
20 15 product is introduced, a package counter-offer is created comprising the original  
product and the additional product for a single proposed price, thus combining the  
individual prices of each of the underlying products. In determining the single proposed  
25 20 price, the CPO Management System blends the additional product's price in order to  
make the original offer acceptable. For example, if a consumer submits an offer to  
purchase airline tickets for \$100 and the CPO Management System determines that the  
30 25 consumer's offer is too low but would be acceptable for \$125, a package counter-offer  
is created with an additional product, such as a rental car. If the rental car can be  
purchased from a seller for \$75, the CPO Management System transmits the package  
35 30 counter-offer including the airline tickets and the rental car to the consumer for a  
25 40 package price of \$200.

45 45 Although the package counter-offer method is effective for increasing  
sales by decreasing seller rejections, a shortcoming is that there is no way for the CPO  
Management System to determine which additional product(s) are appropriate to offer  
as complimentary products for each particular consumer. For example, if a consumer  
50 50 submits an offer for airline tickets, priceline.com knows that hotel rooms and rental cars  
are typically appropriate products to include in a package counter-offer. But if that  
consumer has already booked hotel accommodations but needs a rental car, a counter-

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offer opportunity is wasted if the CPO Management System redundantly counter-offers 10 the consumer a package including a hotel room instead of a rental car. Thus, there exists a need to leverage counter-offer opportunities by counter-offering individual 5 consumers with additional product(s) that they actually need and are therefore more likely to accept as part of a package counter-offer.

Another method utilized to make low consumers' offers acceptable before the offers are rejected is to subsidize the offers. For example, if a consumer's 20 offer of \$100 for an airline ticket through the priceline.com system is low in comparison to the available fare of \$125, the CPO Management System will make such a determination and apply a subsidy amount of \$25 to the offer to make it more 25 likely to be accepted by a seller. However, while this method is effective to sell low-demand, perishable inventory to below-the-fare-line consumers, there is no way for the CPO Management System to allocate its finite subsidy budget in a cost-effective manner. For example, it would be better for the CPO Management System to subsidize 30 offers from consumers who will purchase tickets from a competing air travel service if their offers get rejected because priceline.com will gain market share by diverting sales from competitors. On the other hand, there is no market share advantage by subsidizing 35 offers from consumers who are not likely to purchase tickets from a competitor. Therefore, a need exists to increase the acceptance rate of consumer offers while simultaneously managing a finite subsidy budget in a cost-effective manner.

25 **Summary of the Invention**

In accordance with one aspect of the invention, there is provided a 40 system and a method for processing a sale of an item, the system comprising the steps of obtaining a first conditional purchase offer for the item from a customer, the first 45 conditional purchase offer containing at least a description of the item, a payment identifier for specifying a manner in which funds may be paid and a price, providing a questionnaire having a first question and a first and a second answer to the customer; receiving one of the first and second answers from the customer; performing a predetermined action based upon said received answer; and generating a second 50 35

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10 conditional purchase offer including at least the item based on the predetermined action.

15 In accordance with another aspect of the invention, there is provided a system and a method for processing a sale of an item, the method comprising the steps of: obtaining a first conditional purchase offer for the item from a customer, the first conditional purchase offer containing at least a description of the item, a payment identifier for specifying a manner in which funds may be paid and a price; providing a questionnaire having a first question and a first and a second answer to the customer; receiving one of the first and second answers from the customer; providing the first conditional purchase offer to a plurality of potential sellers; determining whether one or more of the sellers have accepted the first conditional purchase offer, and if one or more sellers have not accepted the first conditional purchase offer; performing a predetermined action based upon the received answer; and generating a second conditional purchase offer including at least the item based on the predetermined action.

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**BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS**

20 FIG. 1 is a schematic block diagram illustrating a CPO Management System in accordance with the present invention;

25 FIG. 2 is a schematic block diagram of the exemplary central controller of FIG. 1;

30 FIG. 3 is a schematic view of the exemplary seller rules database of FIG. 2;

35 FIG. 4 is a schematic view of the exemplary questionnaire database of FIG. 2;

40 FIG. 5 is a schematic view of a questionnaire in accordance with the present invention;

45 FIGS. 6A and 6B are flow diagrams depicting a CPO Evaluation Process according to a first embodiment of the present invention;

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FIGS. 7A through 7C are flow diagrams depicting a CPO Evaluation Process according to a second embodiment of the present invention; and

FIG. 8 is a flow diagram depicting a Rules Evaluation Process in accordance with the present invention.

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#### Detailed Description

Generally, a conditional purchase offer (CPO) management system 100 is disclosed for administering a psychographic questionnaire 1200 (Fig. 5) to a potential buyer during or after the buyer's submission of a CPO. Based on the buyer's answers to the questionnaire 1200, the CPO Management System 100 assesses the buyer's needs and purchasing patterns for the purpose of altering the processing of the CPO.

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FIG. 1 shows the CPO Management System 100 for receiving and processing CPOs for one or more goods or services, from one or more buyers 110 or agents 120 (on behalf of buyers 110). The CPO Management System 100 determines whether one or more sellers, such as sellers 130, 140, 150 are willing to accept a given CPO. As discussed further below, if a seller accepts a given CPO, the CPO Management System 100 binds the buyer on behalf of the accepting seller, to form a legally binding contract.

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As used herein, the following terms are defined to mean:

**Agency-Based Seller** - A seller who has delegated authority to the CPO Management System to accept or reject a given CPO using seller-defined CPO Rules.

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**Broadcast-Based Seller** - A seller who has received a CPO from the CPO Management System (directly or by, for example, access to an electronic posting) for evaluation.

45

**Conditional Purchase Offer (CPO)** - An offer containing one or more conditions submitted by a buyer for the purchase of goods and/or services at a buyer-defined price.

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**Binding Conditional Purchase Offer (Binding CPO)** - A binding offer containing one or more conditions submitted by a buyer for the purchase of goods and/or services at a buyer-defined price. As compared to a CPO, a Binding CPO

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10 includes a payment guarantee, for example with a General Purpose Account and authorization to debit the Account upon acceptance of the Binding CPO.

5                   **Conditional Purchase Offer (CPO) Rule** - A restriction defined by an Agency-Based Seller under which the operator of the CPO Management System may act as an agent to determine whether to fill a CPO for that Agency-Based Seller.

15                   **CPO Management System** - A controller that receives and processes CPOs for one or more goods or services, from one or more buyers, to determine if one or more sellers (Agency-Based or Broadcast-Based Sellers) are willing to accept a  
20                   CPO.

10                   **General Purpose Account** - Any account from which payment can be made, including a credit or debit account.

25                   As shown in FIG. 1, the CPO Management System 100 preferably includes a central controller 200, discussed further below in conjunction with FIG. 2. The CPO Management System 100 may provide a given CPO to selected sellers 130, 140, 150 based on predefined screening criteria, so that sellers only obtain CPOs that they may be interested in or are authorized to screen. Alternatively, the CPO  
30                   Management System 100 may provide all CPOs to all sellers for screening.

20                   As discussed further below, each buyer 110 contacts the CPO Management System 100, for example, by means of telephone, facsimile, online access (i.e. the Internet), electronic mail, in-person contact or through an agent, and provides the CPO Management System 100 with the terms of the buyer's CPO. It is noted that  
35                   each buyer 110 and seller 130, 140, 150 may employ a general-purpose computer for communicating with the CPO Management System 100. The general-purpose computer is preferably comprised of a processing unit, a modem, memory means and any software required to communicate with the CPO Management System 100.

40                   45                   The CPO Management System 100, as well as any general-purpose computers utilized by buyers 110 or sellers 130, 140 (collectively, the "nodes") preferably transmit digitally encoded data and other information between one another. The communication links between the nodes preferably comprise a cable, fiber or  
50                   55                   wireless link on which electronic signals can propagate.

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**AGENCY AND BROADCAST-BASED SELLERS**

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According to one feature of the present invention, the CPO Management System 100 preferably provides an optional agency feature that permits the CPO Management System 100 to accept or reject a given CPO on behalf of certain agency-based sellers 130 who have delegated such authority to the CPO Management System 100. Thus, the CPO Management System 100 preferably (i) evaluates CPOs on behalf of certain agency-based sellers 130 who have delegated authority to the CPO Management System 100 to accept or reject a given CPO, and (ii) permits broadcast-based sellers, such as sellers 140, 150 to evaluate CPOs independently.

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Thus, the CPO Management System 100 can preferably provide one or more CPOs to each broadcast-based seller 140, 150, for the seller 140, 150 to independently determine whether or not to accept a given CPO. It is noted that the CPO Management System 100 can provide a CPO to each appropriate broadcast-based seller 140, 150, for example, by means of a broadcast transmission, or by means of posting the CPO, for example, on an electronic bulletin board accessible by each broadcast-based seller 140, 150. Alternatively, the CPO Management System 100 can evaluate one or more CPOs against a number of CPO rules defined by one or more agency-based sellers 130, to decide on behalf of an agency-based seller 130 to accept or reject a given CPO. An illustrative set of CPO rules for one illustrative agency-based seller 130 is set forth in FIG. 3, discussed in more detail below. Thus, the CPO Management System 100 can determine if one or more sellers 140, 150 accept a given CPO by providing the CPO to each seller 140, 150 and receiving an acceptance or rejection, or by applying the CPO to the CPO rules to render a decision to either accept, reject or counter a CPO on behalf of a particular seller 130.

As discussed further below, a CPO rule is a set of restrictions defined by a given agency-based seller 130 for which the seller 130 is willing to accept a CPO. For a more detailed discussion of CPO rules, the manner in which they are generated, and related security issues, see U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 08/889,319, entitled "Conditional Purchase Offer Management System," referenced above, and International

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10 Patent Application PCT/US97/15492, entitled "Conditional Purchase Offer  
Management Systems," incorporated by reference herein.

15 FIG. 2 is a block diagram showing the architecture of an illustrative  
central controller 200. The central controller 200 preferably includes certain standard  
hardware components, such as a central processing unit (CPU) 205, a random access  
memory (RAM) 210, a read only memory (ROM) 220, a clock 225, a data storage  
device 230, and a communications port 240. The CPU 205 is preferably linked to each  
of the other listed elements, either by means of a shared data bus, or dedicated  
20 connections, as shown in FIG. 2. The communications port 240 connects the central  
controller 200 to each buyer 110 and seller 130, 140, 150. The communications port  
240 preferably includes multiple communication channels for simultaneously  
establishing a plurality of connections.

25 15 The ROM 220 and/or data storage device 230 are operable to store one  
or more instructions, discussed further below in conjunction with FIGS. 6A and 6B,  
FIGS. 7A, 7B and 7C, and FIG. 8, which the CPU 205 is operable to retrieve, interpret  
30 and execute. For example, the ROM 220 and/or data storage device 230 preferably  
store processes to accomplish the transfer of required payments, charges and debits,  
20 between the sellers 130, 140, 150 and buyer 110. The processing of such accounting  
transactions are preferably secured in a conventional manner, for example, using well-  
35 known cryptographic techniques.

25 The data storage device 230 includes a seller database 300, a buyer  
40 database 400, an offer database 500, a questionnaire database 600 (discussed in more  
detail below with respect to FIG. 4) and a seller rules database 700. The seller database  
300 preferably stores information on each seller 130, 140, 150 which is registered with  
the CPO Management System 100 to sell goods or services to CPO buyers, including  
45 contact information. The buyer database 400 preferably stores information on each  
buyer of the CPO Management System 100, including identification information and  
billing information, such as a credit card number. The offer database 500 preferably  
contains a record of each CPO processed by the CPO Management System 100,  
50 including the conditions associated with the CPO and the associated status.

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10 As previously mentioned, the seller rules database 700 set forth in FIG. 3  
preferably maintains the CPO rules for one or more agency-based sellers. The seller  
rules database 700 maintains a plurality of records, such as records 705, 710, 715, each  
5 associated with a different CPO rule identified by rule number in field 720 and  
identifying the associated seller by identifier in field 730. The conditions of the original  
CPO which must be present in order for the rule to apply are set forth in field 740, and  
the conditions of the rule itself are set forth in field 750. Any additional terms and  
conditions that the buyer must agree to are recorded in field 760. The action item that is  
20 initiated upon satisfaction of a rule is set forth in field 770.

10 As also previously indicated, the data storage device 230 maintains a  
questionnaire database 600 that stores questions and answers of a psychographic  
25 questionnaire, and actions based upon those answers. A psychographic questionnaire is  
15 a questionnaire specifically designed to assess the buyer's needs and purchasing  
patterns. An example of a psychographic questionnaire 1200 to be presented to the  
buyer is illustrated in FIG. 5.

30 Referring to FIG. 4, the questionnaire database 600 maintains a plurality  
20 of records, such as records 605 to 625, each associated with a different psychographic  
question of the questionnaire 1200 stored in field 630 and designed to elicit a particular  
35 answer choice that is stored in field 635. The action items in field 640 are initiated upon  
the match of an answer choice in field 635 to its corresponding question in field 630,  
and include: (i) a counter-offer (record 605), (ii) a package counter-offer (records 610  
25 and 625), (iii) a subsidy (record 615) and (iv) instant acceptance subject to a  
40 reasonableness test (record 620).

30 According to a first embodiment of the invention, discussed in more  
45 detail below, the questionnaire 1200 functions to elicit answers from the buyer for the  
purpose of making efficient counter-offer decisions *after* the buyer's CPO has been  
35 rejected by all sellers ("Post-Rejection CPO Evaluation Process 800"). After the  
submission of the buyer's CPO, the buyer is asked to participate in a survey. In one  
example, the survey question is "Are you a frequent leisure traveler who flies more than  
5 times a year?" The possible answer choices are (A) Yes or (B) No. As set forth in  
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10 record 605, the CPO Management System 100 is configured to evaluate the buyer's answer to the survey question and to counter-offer the buyer if the buyer responds "(A) Yes" and if the buyer's offer has been rejected. More specifically, record 605 is  
5 provided to counter-offer rejected frequent travelers who fly more than 5 times per year with a price equal to the buyer's offered price plus 20% of the offered price.  
15 Accordingly, the decision of whether or not to counter-offer the buyer is made efficiently and wisely because frequent travelers (such as the buyer), if pleased, are likely to use the CPO Management System 100 in the future.

20 10 Another example of a survey question according to the Post-Rejection CPO Evaluation Process 800 is "Do you have lodging accommodations planned for your trip" Again, the possible answer choices are (A) Yes or (B) No. As set forth in  
25 record 610, the CPO Management System 100 is configured to evaluate the buyer's answer to the survey question and to package counter-offer the buyer if the buyer  
15 responds "(B) No" and if the buyer's offer is rejected. More specifically, record 610 is designed to generate a hotel/airline package counter-offer to rejected buyers who do not yet have lodging accommodations for their trips. Once again, the decision of *who* and  
30 *what* to counter-offer is made efficiently and wisely because travelers (such as the buyer) who do not yet have lodging arrangements are more likely than not to accept a package counter-offer including a lodging component. This process also eliminates a wasted hotel/airline package counter-offer to travelers who do not require a hotel.

35 20 According to a second embodiment of the invention, discussed in more detail below, the questionnaire 1200 functions to elicit answers for the purpose of making intelligent counter-offer decisions *before* a CPO is evaluated to determine if it is acceptable by one of a plurality of sellers ("Pre-Processing CPO Evaluation Process 1000"). During or after the submission of a buyer's CPO, the buyer is asked to  
40 25 participate in a survey. In one example, the survey question is "If we are unable to find you tickets at your price for this trip, what will you do?" The possible answer choices are (A) Drive, (B) Not go, (C) Buy tickets directly from a major airline, or (D) Buy  
45 30 tickets from another on-line travel service. As set forth in record 615, the CPO Management System 100 is configured to evaluate the buyer's offer and to subsidize  
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10 the buyer if the buyer responds "(C) Buy tickets directly from a major airline" and if the  
buyer's offer is considered to be too low for acceptance. More specifically, record 615  
is designed to subsidize the buyer pre-processing, with whatever amount necessary to  
make the offer acceptable if the buyer indicates that he will alternatively buy tickets  
5 directly from a major airline. As previously described, the gain in market share from the  
buyer may be worth the cost of the subsidy. It should be noted that other actions may be  
required for discriminatory subsidization, such as determining whether or not there is  
enough money in a subsidy budget to apply to a given offer or determining whether the  
20 subsidy amount exceeds a threshold dollar amount (e.g., \$50/offer).

25 In another example of the Pre-Processing CPO Evaluation Process 1000,  
the questionnaire 1200 functions to elicit answers for the purpose of making efficient  
instantaneous acceptance or rejection decisions. Here, the survey question is once again  
15 "If we are unable to find you tickets at your price for this trip, what will you do?" The  
answer choices are (A) Drive, (B) Not go, (C) Buy tickets directly from a major airline,  
or (D) Buy from another on-line travel service. As set forth in record 620, the CPO  
Management System 100 is configured to evaluate and instantly accept low offers from  
30 buyers who answer "(D) Buy from another on-line travel service," provided that the  
buyer submits an offer determined to be reasonable based on an instantly available  
20 statistical or historical analysis. More specifically, record 620 is designed to perform a  
reasonableness test and to instantly accept a buyer's offer if it is reasonable and if the  
buyer indicates he will purchase tickets from another on-line travel service if his offer is  
35 rejected. The reasonableness test may consist of, e.g., the system determining if the  
buyer's offer at least exceeds a statistically or historically determined threshold amount  
25 for the particular conditions of the offer. Once again, the gain in market share from the  
buyer may be worth the acceptance of a low, but reasonable, offer.

40 In yet another example of the Pre-Processing CPO Evaluation Process  
45 1000, the questionnaire 1200 functions to elicit answers for the purpose of the CPO  
Management System 100 making efficient package counter-offer decisions. The survey  
question is "Do you need hotel accommodations for your stay in your destination city?"  
50 The possible answer choices are (A) Yes or (B) No. The CPO Management System 100  
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10           is configured to evaluate the buyer's offer and to counter-offer a hotel as a component  
of a package counter-offer if the buyer responds "(A) Yes." More specifically, record  
625 is designed to provide counter-offer to buyers who affirmatively express necessity  
5           for such accommodations. As previously described, the package counter-offer is  
15           customized to that particular buyer so as to not waste any opportunities to make the  
buyer's low offer acceptable or to sell additional products.

20           Alternate embodiments of psychographic question/answer choices  
10           include those that trigger actions based on the conditions of a buyer's CPO or those that  
are age-based, e.g., the system may assume that a 22 year-old traveler is more flexible  
than an older traveler and is therefore more apt to change his destination airport so long  
as it is still in the same city.

25           The data storage device 230 also includes the Post-Rejection CPO  
15           Evaluation Process 800, the Pre-Processing CPO Evaluation Process 1000 and a Rules  
Evaluation Process 900, discussed further below in conjunction with FIGS. 6A and 6B,  
30           FIGS. 7A, 7B and 7C, and FIG. 8. Generally, both CPO Evaluation Processes 800 and  
1000 (i) receive a CPO from a buyer 110, (ii) provide the questions and answers set  
forth in the questionnaire 1200 to the buyer, (iii) provide the CPO to the appropriate  
20           broadcast-based sellers 140, 150 and evaluate each CPO against the appropriate rules of  
each agency-based seller 130, and (iv) determine whether any sellers 130, 140, 150  
35           accept the CPO. The Rules Evaluation Process 900 is a subroutine executed by the CPO  
Evaluation Processes 800 and 1000, which receives a CPO and compares the CPO  
25           against the rules of one or more agency-based sellers to generate a response on behalf  
40           of the sellers to the given CPO.

45           As previously described, the Post-Rejection CPO Evaluation Process  
30           800 compares the buyer's answer choices with those in field 635 of the questionnaire  
database 600 *after* the buyer's original offer has been rejected. If the buyer's answer  
choice(s) "match" one or more records, i.e., correspond to the answer choice(s) in field  
35           635 for a given question in field 630, the counter-offer, subsidy or instant acceptance  
action in field 640 of that record may be triggered. In the Pre-Processing CPO

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10 Evaluation Process 1000, the same comparison generally described above is performed, but *before* the buyer's offer is transmitted to the sellers for consideration.

Post-Rejection CPO Evaluation Process Embodiment

15 The Post-Rejection CPO Evaluation Process 800 described above will now be described in detail with reference to FIGS. 6A and 6B. The Post-Rejection CPO Evaluation Process 800 begins at step 805 of FIG. 6A, where a CPO is received from the buyer for an identified good or service. The CPO is evaluated in step 810 to  
20 determine whether or not it is a valid offer, and, in step 820, if it is determined that the CPO is not valid, the buyer is requested to re-transmit the CPO.

25 The CPO may optionally be a Binding CPO, wherein authorization is obtained with the buyer offer to bind the buyer if and when the offer is accepted by a seller. In a Binding CPO, there are typically no provisions for a Buyer to renege. The present invention is described with respect to a non-binding CPO, wherein a buyer may renege after a seller acceptance. In the described embodiment, a penalty may be  
30 assessed against a buyer who reneges after an acceptance by a seller.

20 The CPO may also contain a seller-defined variable or flexible condition, typically specified using a range. For example, the variable condition may be a date range within which the product may be delivered by the seller. Other variable conditions might include: a price range, a performance range, a quality range, etc. The seller may then choose a product to fill the buyer's flexible condition within the  
35 specified range. Such a variable condition may provide substantial assistance to the seller in filling the buyer's CPO. For example, with respect to an airline ticket, the seller may be able to meet a buyer's specified price if the CPO permits him to select a flight within a range of times or days.

40 In step 815, when a valid CPO is received, a payment identifier of a General Purpose Account, such as a credit or debit card account from which funds may be paid, is received. The General Purpose Account is used with a Binding CPO to guarantee payment of the goods or services if a seller accepts the CPO. In the described  
45 non-binding CPO, the General Purpose Account may be used to guarantee payment of a  
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fee or penalty if the buyer reneges on its promise to purchase the goods or services. Thus, in step 825, the payment identifier is evaluated to determine whether or not it is a valid payment identifier. For example, the system may query a remote authorization server to verify that sufficient funds are available in the General Purpose Account to cover the buyer's CPO offer price. In step 830, if it is determined that the payment identifier is invalid, the buyer is requested to either re-transmit the payment identifier or to transmit another payment identifier.

When a payment identifier has been found to be acceptable, the questionnaire 1200 set forth in FIG. 5 is transmitted to the buyer in step 835. After the buyer has had an opportunity to select answers to each of the questions, the buyer reports the answers back to the CPO Management System 100. Such reporting can be performed by telephone, facsimile, e-mail, over the Internet, etc. The buyer's answers are received by the CPO Management System 100 in step 840.

In step 845, the CPO is transmitted to broadcast-based sellers and the Rules Evaluation Process 900 is executed on behalf of agency-based sellers. The Rules Evaluation Process 900, discussed in detail below in conjunction with FIG. 8, evaluates whether or not the buyer's CPO is accepted as in conformance with CPO Rules provided by an Agency-Based Seller. In step 850, it is determined if an acceptance signal thus results from Rules Evaluation Process 900, and/or is received from a broadcast-based seller. If so, one acceptance signal is selected in step 855. The seller corresponding to the acceptance signal is identified by reference to its seller identifier in the seller database 400 in step 860, and in step 865, the seller(s) are then provided with the buyer's personal information as set forth in the buyer database 500, such as the buyer's name, address and payment identifier.

In step 870, it is determined whether or not the buyer has reneged on its offer to purchase the goods or services described in the CPO. If the buyer has followed through with its purchase, the CPO Post-Rejection Evaluation Process 800 ends at step 875. If the buyer has reneged, a penalty is collected from the buyer in step 880 by the payment method corresponding to the payment identifier described above. The Post-Rejection CPO Evaluation Process 800 then terminates in step 875.

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10 If in step 850 it is determined that the CPO has not been accepted by at least one agency or broadcast-based seller after the predetermined period of time, the answers to the questionnaire 1200 are evaluated against the questionnaire database 600 in step 882. Here, the buyer's question and answer choices are compared with the  
5 question and answer choice fields 630 and 635, respectively, in order from record 605 to record 610 (i.e., the records relevant to the Post-Rejection CPO Evaluation Process 800) to determine whether or not there is a match. If a match in question and answer choice is found, the record in the questionnaire database 600 is retrieved and the action set forth in field 640 corresponding to the pulled record is executed in step 884. It is noted that the actions in records 605 and 610 both include counter-offers.

20 In step 886, a test is performed to determine whether or not the buyer has accepted the counter-offer. If it is determined that the buyer did not accept the  
25 counter-offer, step 882 is repeated until review of all of the records have been exhausted. Once it is determined that there are no more actions to be taken, the CPO Post-Rejection Evaluation Process 800 ends in step 888. If, on the other hand, in step 30 886 it is determined that the buyer did accept the counter-offer, the Post-Rejection CPO evaluation Process 800 continues at step 865, described above.

35 In the described embodiment, a proposed counter-offer accepted by a buyer is automatically accepted by the CPO Management System. In an alternate embodiment, a counter-offer accepted by a buyer may subsequently be resubmitted to both agency and broad-case based sellers to determine if there is a seller acceptance.

40 **Pre-Processing CPO Evaluation Process Embodiment**

45 The Pre-Processing CPO Evaluation Process 1000 described above will now be described in detail with reference to FIGS. 7A, 7B and 7C. The Pre-Processing CPO Evaluation Process 1000 begins at step 1005 of FIG. 7A, where a CPO is received from the buyer for an identified good or service. The CPO is evaluated in step 1010 to determine whether or not it is a valid offer, and, in step 1020, if it is determined that the CPO is not valid, the buyer is requested to re-transmit the CPO.

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10 As with the Post-Rejection CPO Evaluation Process 800 described above, the CPO may optionally be a Binding CPO, or a non-binding CPO as described herein.

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5 In step 1015, when a valid CPO is received, a payment identifier of a General Purpose Account, such as a credit or debit card account from which funds may be paid, is received. The payment identifier guarantees payment of the goods or services if a seller accepts the CPO or the payment of a fee or penalty if the buyer reneges on its promise to purchase the goods or services. Thus, in step 1025, the 10 payment identifier is evaluated to determine whether or not it is a valid payment identifier. As described above, the system may query a remote authorization server to verify that sufficient funds are available in the General Purpose Account to cover the 20 buyer's CPO. In step 1030, if it is determined that the payment identifier is invalid, the 25 buyer is requested to re-transmit the payment identifier or to transmit another payment identifier.

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When a payment identifier has been found to be acceptable, the questionnaire 1200 set forth in FIG. 5 is transmitted to the buyer in step 1035. After the 20 buyer has had an opportunity to select its answers to each of the questions, the buyer reports the answers back to the CPO Management System 100. Once again, such reporting can be performed by telephone, facsimile, e-mail, over the Internet, etc. The 35 buyer's answers are received by the CPO Management System 100 in step 1040.

40

25 The answers to the questionnaire 1200 are evaluated against the questionnaire database 1000 in step 1045 by comparing the buyer's question and answer choices with the question and answer choice fields 630 and 635, respectively, in order from record 615 to record 620 to record 625 (i.e., the records relevant to the Pre-Processing CPO Evaluation Process 1000) to determine whether or not there is a match.

45

30 If there is no match in step 1045, the original CPO is transmitted to broadcast-based sellers and the Rules Evaluation Process 900 is executed on behalf of agency-based sellers in step 1055. The Rules Evaluation Process 900 is discussed below in conjunction with FIG. 8. It is then determined whether or not the CPO has 50 been accepted by at least one agency or broadcast-based seller in step 1060, by 35

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10 determining whether or not at least one acceptance signal either results from the Rules  
Evaluation Process, and/or has been received from a broadcast-based seller over a  
predetermined period of time. If so, one acceptance signal is selected in step 1070. The  
5 seller corresponding to the acceptance signal is identified by reference to its seller  
identifier in the seller database 400 in step 1080, and in step 1085 the seller(s) are then  
transmitted the buyer's personal information as set forth in the buyer database 500, such  
as the buyer's name, address and payment identifier. If an acceptance signal is not  
received, the Pre-Processing CPO Evaluation Process 1000 ends in step 1065.

20 10 In step 1090, it is determined whether or not the buyer has reneged on its  
offer to purchase the goods or services described in the CPO. If the buyer has followed  
through with the purchase, the Pre-Processing CPO Evaluation Process 1000 ends at  
25 step 1100. If the buyer has reneged, in step 1095 a penalty is collected from the buyer  
by the payment method corresponding to the payment identifier described above. The  
Pre-Processing CPO Evaluation Process 1000 then terminates in step 1100.

30 15 If a match in question and answer choice is found in step 1045, the  
record in the questionnaire database 600 is pulled and the action set forth in field 640  
corresponding to that record is executed in step 1050. In step 1110, it is determined  
20 whether or not the executed action requires a response from the buyer. For example, the  
action set forth in field 640 of record 625 involves a package counter-offer which  
35 requires an acceptance or a rejection from the buyer in step 1120. If for such an action it  
is determined that the buyer does not accept, step 1045 is repeated until a review of all  
25 of the relevant records have been exhausted. If the buyer does accept, the terms of the  
counter-offer, which have been proposed to and accepted by the buyer, are transmitted  
40 to broadcast-based sellers and the Rules Evaluation Process 900 is executed on behalf  
of agency-based sellers in step 1055.

45 30 If a buyer response is determined to not be required in step 1110, such as  
with the application of the subsidy of record 615, the terms of the subsidized offer is  
transmitted to broadcast-based sellers, and the Rules Evaluation Process 900 is  
executed on behalf of agency-based sellers in step 1055. In other embodiments, such as

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10 that set out in record 620, there is an instant acceptance of the revised offer by the CPO Management System.

15 As previously indicated, both CPO Evaluation Processes 800 and 1000 execute a Rules Evaluation Process 900 during steps 840 and 1055, respectively, to determine if one or more agency-based sellers are willing to accept a given CPO. As shown in FIG. 8, the Rules Evaluation Process 900 compares the conditions associated with the CPO during step 910 with the corresponding restrictions set forth in any CPO rules defined by any agency-based sellers. A test is then performed during step 920 to determine if any CPO rule is satisfied. If it is determined during step 920 that no CPO rule is satisfied, then program control terminates during step 940. If, however, it is determined during step 920 that a CPO rule is satisfied, an acceptance signal may be generated as necessary, and the corresponding seller is identified during step 930.

20

25 before program control terminates during step 940.

30 It is desirable that in one embodiment the present invention include features that prevent buyers from repetitively querying, or 'pinging,' the system, to determine the underlying price flexibility of the sellers. Such pinging might result in potential damage to the seller's price margins and profitability. As mentioned above, requiring the buyer 110 to enter into a Binding CPO at least discourages pinging by insuring that if an offer is accepted, the product is actually purchased. Another method of discouraging pinging includes preventing buyers from submitting repetitive, similar offers. For example, repetitive CPOs changing only the offer price in an effort to

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40 determine price flexibility may be blocked by the system. In one embodiment, subsequent CPOs by the same buyer 110 are accepted by the CPO Management System 100 only if there is some substantial change to the buyer specifications that would result in the purchase of an essentially different product. For example, with respect to the sale of airline tickets, subsequent CPOs may be accepted for processing only if there is a significant change in the itinerary. Yet another method for discouraging pinging is to require a payment for each submission of a CPO.

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50 It is also desirable that in another embodiment of the invention, sellers' identities are maintained anonymous within the CPO Management System 100 until a

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10 CPO is accepted. Such identity anonymity, by itself and in combination with the  
discouragement of price ping discussed herein, enables sellers to participate in the  
CPO Management System 100 process without fear of undercutting their published  
5 price structures and losing their regular customer base. For example, most sellers have  
published product prices, and loyal customers who willingly pay those prices.  
15 Participating in the CPO Management System 100 enables these sellers to discount  
those products, potentially below their published prices, to fill offers from buyers who  
might not otherwise pay published prices. With anonymity, these sellers can more  
20 freely participate in the CPO Management System 100 process with less fear of losing  
their regular customers and undercutting their published price structure.

25 It is to be understood that the embodiments and variations shown and  
described herein are merely illustrative of the principle of this invention and that  
15 various modifications may be implemented by those skilled in the art without departing  
from the scope and spirit of the invention.

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**Claims**

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What is claimed is:

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1. A method for processing a sale of an item, comprising the steps  
5 of:

obtaining a first conditional purchase offer for said item from a  
customer, said first conditional purchase offer containing at least a description of said  
item, a payment identifier for specifying a manner in which funds may be paid and a  
price;

20

- 10 providing a questionnaire having a first question and a first and a  
second answer to said customer;

25

receiving one of said first and second answers from said  
customer;

- 15 performing a predetermined action based upon said received  
answer; and

30

generating a second conditional purchase offer including at least  
said item based on said predetermined action.

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- 20 2. The method according to claim 1 and further comprising the step  
of providing said second conditional purchase offer to a plurality of potential sellers.

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- 25 3. The method according to claim 2, further comprising the step of  
receiving from one or more of said sellers an acceptance of said second conditional  
purchase offer.

45

- 30 4. The method according to claim 3, further comprising the step of  
binding said customer to purchase at least said item upon receipt of said acceptance.

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- 35 5. The method according to claim 1, wherein said predetermined  
action is selected from the group consisting of: generating a package to offer to said

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10 customer. said package containing said item specified by said first conditional purchase offer and one or more additional items. subsidizing the price of said first conditional purchase offer, or acceptance of said first conditional purchase offer.

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15 6. The method according to claim 1, wherein the step of performing said predetermined action comprises the steps of:

20 10 assembling a package including said item and one or more additional items;

offering said package to said customer; and

receiving an acceptance or a rejection signal from said customer;

25 wherein said second conditional purchase offer is the same as the first conditional purchase offer if said rejection signal is received.

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30 7. The method according to claim 6, wherein said package is offered to said customer at a single price.

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8. The method according to claim 6, wherein said additional items are complimentary to said item specified in said first conditional purchase offer.

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9. The method according to claim 1, wherein the step of performing said predetermined action comprises the steps of:

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40 evaluating said price of said first conditional purchase offer to determine whether it is reasonable; and

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sending an acceptance signal to said customer if said price of said first conditional purchase offer is reasonable.

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10. The method according to claim 9, wherein the step of evaluating said price of said first conditional purchase offer comprises the step of determining

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10                   whether said price at least exceeds a statistically or historically determined threshold amount.

5                   11.   The method according to claim 1, wherein the step of performing  
15                   said predetermined action comprises the steps of:  
                      obtaining a subsidy to increase said price;  
                      allocating said subsidy to said price of said first conditional  
20                   purchase offer to establish a second price, wherein said second conditional purchase  
                     offer comprises said second price.

25                   12.   The method according to claim 11, wherein said step of  
15                   obtaining said subsidy includes the step of determining whether a sufficient amount of  
                     money exists in a subsidy budget before said step of allocating said subsidy.

30                   13.   The method according to claim 1, further comprising the step of  
                     initiating the use of said payment identifier to collect said funds.

20                   14.   The method according to claim 1, wherein said funds are paid  
35                   from a General Purpose Account.

25                   15.   The method according to claim 1, wherein said first conditional  
40                   purchase offer further contains a variable condition.

30                   16.   The method according to claim 15, wherein said variable  
45                   condition is selected from the group consisting of: a price range, a performance range  
                     or a quality range.

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17. The method according to claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

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determining whether said first conditional purchase offer has been previously submitted by said customer before said step of providing said questionnaire; and  
rejecting said first conditional purchase offer if said first conditional purchase offer has been previously submitted by said customer.

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18. The method of claim 1, wherein said sellers are anonymous to said customer.

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19. A method for processing a sale of an item, comprising the steps of:

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obtaining a first conditional purchase offer for said item from a customer, said first conditional purchase offer containing at least a description of said item, a payment identifier for specifying a manner in which funds may be paid and a price;

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providing a questionnaire having a first question and a first and a second answer to said customer;

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receiving one of said first and second answers from said customer;

40

providing said first conditional purchase offer to a plurality of potential sellers;

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determining whether one or more of said sellers have accepted said first conditional purchase offer, and if one or more sellers have not accepted said first conditional purchase offer;

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performing a predetermined action based upon said received answer; and

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10 generating a second conditional purchase offer including at least  
said item based on said predetermined action.

15 5 20. The method according to claim 19 and further including the step  
of providing said second conditional purchase offer to said plurality of potential sellers.

20 10 21. The method according to claim 20, further comprising the step of  
receiving from one or more of said sellers an acceptance of said second conditional  
purchase offer.

25 15 22. The method according to claim 21, further comprising the step of  
binding said customer to purchase at least said item upon receipt of said acceptance of  
said second conditional purchase offer.

30 20 23. The method according to claim 19, wherein said predetermined  
action is selected from the group consisting of: generating a package to offer to said  
customer, said package containing said item specified by said first conditional purchase  
offer and one or more additional items, subsidizing the price of said first conditional  
purchase offer, or acceptance of said first conditional purchase offer.

40 25 24. The method according to claim 19, wherein the step of  
performing said predetermined action comprises the steps of:  
assembling a package including said item and one or more  
additional items;  
offering said package to said customer; and  
receiving an acceptance or a rejection signal from said customer;  
wherein said second conditional purchase offer is the same as  
said first conditional purchase offer if said rejection signal is received.

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25. The method according to claim 24, wherein said package is offered to said customer at a single price.

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5 26. The method according to claim 24, wherein said additional items are complimentary to said item specified in said first conditional purchase offer.

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10 27. The method according to claim 19, wherein the step of performing said predetermined action comprises the steps of:  
evaluating said price of said second conditional purchase offer to determine whether it is reasonable; and  
sending an acceptance signal to said customer if said price of said second conditional purchase offer is reasonable.

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28. The method according to claim 27, wherein the step of evaluating said price of said second conditional purchase offer comprises the step of determining whether said price at least exceeds a statistically or historically determined threshold amount.

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29. The method according to claim 19, wherein the step of performing said predetermined action comprises the steps of:

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25 30. obtaining a subsidy to increase said price, and  
allocating said subsidy to said price of said first conditional purchase offer to establish a second price, wherein said second conditional purchase offer comprises said second price.

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30 30. The method according to claim 29, wherein said step of obtaining said subsidy includes the step of determining whether a sufficient amount of money exists in a subsidy budget before said step of allocating said subsidy.

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10 31. The method according to claim 19, further comprising the step of  
initiating the use of said payment identifier to collect said funds.

15 32. The method according to claim 19, wherein said funds are paid  
from a General Purpose Account.

20 33. The method according to claim 19, wherein said first conditional  
10 purchase offer further contains a variable condition.

25 34. The method according to claim 33, wherein said variable  
15 condition is selected from the group consisting of: a price range, a performance range  
or a quality range.

30 35. The method according to claim 19, further comprising the  
steps of:

20 determining whether said first conditional purchase offer has  
been previously submitted by said customer before said step of providing said  
questionnaire; and

35 rejecting said first conditional purchase offer if said first  
conditional purchase offer has been previously submitted by said customer.

25 36. The method of claim 19, wherein said sellers are anonymous to  
40 said customer.

45 30 37. A system for processing a sale of an item, comprising:  
35 one or more communications ports configured to obtain a first  
conditional purchase offer for said item from a customer, said first conditional purchase  
offer containing at least a description of said item, a payment identifier for specifying a  
manner in which funds may be paid and a price, said ports further configured to provide

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a questionnaire having a first question and a first and a second answer to said customer and to receive one of said first and second answers from said customer; and

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one or more processors to perform a predetermined action based upon said received answer and to provide a second conditional purchase offer including at least said item to a plurality of potential sellers.

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38. The system according to claim 37, wherein said processors are further configured to assemble a package including said item and one or more additional items, offer said package to said customer, and receive an acceptance or a rejection signal from said customer.

25

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39. The system according to claim 37, wherein said processors are further configured to evaluate said price of said first conditional purchase offer to determine whether it is reasonable, and to send an acceptance signal to said customer if said first conditional purchase offer is reasonable.

30

20

40. The system according to claim 37, wherein said processors are further configured to obtain a subsidy to increase said price, allocate said subsidy to said price of said first conditional purchase offer to establish a second price, wherein said second conditional purchase offer comprises said second price.

25

40

30

41. A system for processing a sale of an item, comprising:  
one or more communications ports configured to obtain a first conditional purchase offer for said item from a customer, said first conditional purchase offer containing at least a description of said item, a payment identifier for specifying a manner in which funds may be paid and a price, said ports further configured to provide a questionnaire having a first question and a first and a second answer to said customer and to receive one of said first and second answers from said customer; and

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10                 one or more processors to provide said first conditional purchase  
offer to a plurality of potential sellers, determine whether one or more of said sellers  
have accepted said first conditional purchase offer, and if one or more sellers have not  
5                 accepted said first conditional purchase offer, to perform a predetermined action based  
upon said received answer, and to provide a second conditional purchase offer  
15                 including at least said item to said sellers.

20                 42.         The system according to claim 41, wherein said processors are  
10                 further configured to assemble a package including said item and one or more  
additional items, offer said package to said customer, and receive an acceptance or a  
rejection signal from said customer.

25                 43.         The system according to claim 41, wherein said processors are  
15                 further configured to evaluate said price of said first conditional purchase offer to  
determine whether it is reasonable, and to send an acceptance signal to said customer if  
30                 said first conditional purchase offer is reasonable.

20                 44.         The system according to claim 41, wherein said processors are  
35                 further configured to obtain a subsidy to increase said price, allocate said subsidy to  
said price of said first conditional purchase offer to establish a second price, wherein  
25                 said second conditional purchase offer comprises said second price.

40                 45.         The method according to claim 2 wherein said step of providing  
said second conditional purchase offer to a plurality of potential sellers includes at least  
30                 one of:

45                 35                 providing said second conditional purchase offer to a plurality of  
broadcast-based sellers; and  
                       comparing said second conditional purchase offer to a plurality  
50                 of conditional purchase offer rules provided by agency-based sellers.

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10           46. The method according to claim 20 wherein said step of providing  
said first conditional purchase offer to a plurality of potential sellers and said step of  
providing said second conditional purchase offer to a plurality of potential sellers each  
includes at least one of:

15           5           providing said second conditional purchase offer to a plurality of  
broadcast-based sellers; and  
                comparing said second conditional purchase offer to a plurality  
of conditional purchase offer rules provided by agency-based sellers.

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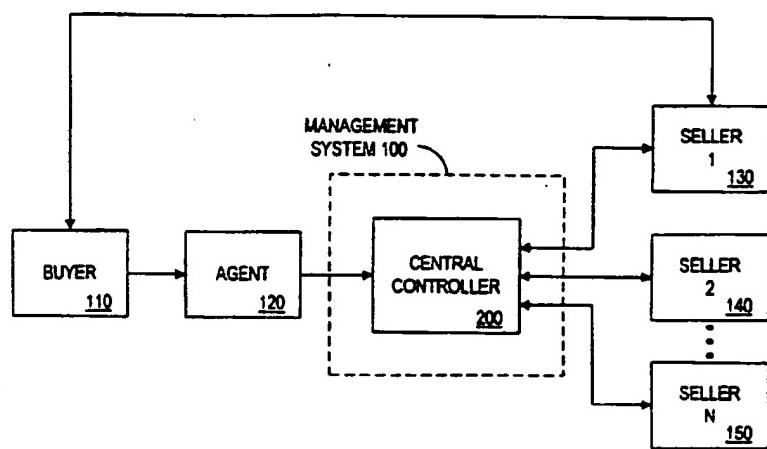


FIG. 1

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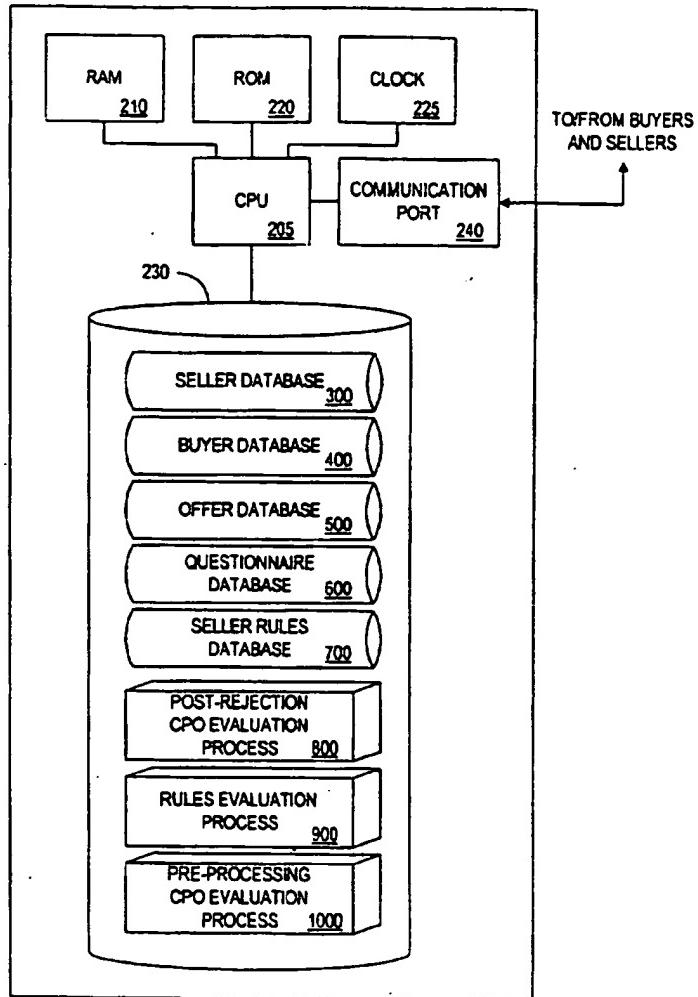


FIG. 2

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| RULE NUMBER | SELLER IDENTIFIER | ORIGINAL CPO CONDITIONS              | RULE                                 | ADDITIONAL TERMS AND CONDITIONS        | ACTION  |
|-------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|---|
| 720         | 730               | 740                                  | 750                                  | 750                                    | 770   |
| 5555        | S81818            | ROUND TRIP AIR TRAVEL TO NEW YORK    | RETURN AT LEAST 7 DAYS AFTER ARRIVAL | STAY AT SHERATON FOR AT LEAST 5 NIGHTS | PROVIDE OFFER TO BUYER, SUBSIDIZE CPO WITH UP TO \$100 FROM SELLER'S ACCOUNT, ALLOCATE IN \$25 AMOUNTS EVERY 2 DAYS UNTIL ACCEPTANCE    |
| 6537        | S47474            | ROUND TRIP AIR TRAVEL TO LOS ANGELES | RETURN AT LEAST 5 DAYS AFTER ARRIVAL | STAY AT HILTON FOR AT LEAST 3 NIGHTS   | PRESENT SELLERS OF ORIGINALLY REQUESTED PRODUCT WITH PACKAGE CPO COUNTER-OFFER PROPOSAL TO INCLUDE TERMS AND CONDITIONS AND \$275 PRICE |
| 4572        | S47474            | WEEKEND CAR RENTAL, NEW YORK CITY    | OFFER MUST BE FOR AT LEAST \$200     | N/A                                    | ACCEPT CPO  |

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FIG. 3

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| QUESTION  | ANSWER CHOICE                                 | ACTION  |
|---|---|---|
| 630   | 635   | 640   |
| ARE YOU A FREQUENT TRAVELER WHO FLIES MORE THAN 5 TIMES A YEAR?                     | (A) YES                                       | IF REJECTED, COUNTER-OFFER (OFFERED PRICE) + (20% OF OFFERED PRICE) |
| DO YOU HAVE LODGING ACCOMMODATIONS PLANNED FOR YOUR TRIP?                           | (B) NO  | IF REJECTED, PERFORM HOTEL/AIRLINE TICKET PACKAGE COUNTER-OFFER     |
| IF WE ARE UNABLE TO FIND YOU TICKETS AT YOUR PRICE FOR THIS TRIP, WHAT WILL YOU DO? | (C) BUY TICKETS DIRECTLY FROM A MAJOR AIRLINE | SUBSIDIZE OFFER   |
| IF WE ARE UNABLE TO FIND YOU TICKETS AT YOUR PRICE FOR THIS TRIP, WHAT WILL YOU DO? | (D) BUY FROM AN ON-LINE TRAVEL SERVICE        | PERFORM REASONABILITY TEST, INSTANT ACCEPTANCE IF REASONABLE        |
| DO YOU NEED HOTEL ACCOMMODATIONS FOR YOUR STAY IN YOUR DESTINATION CITY?            | (A) YES                                       | PERFORM HOTEL/AIRLINE TICKET PACKAGE COUNTER-OFFER                  |

FIG. 4

1200

**QUESTIONNAIRE**

1.) ARE YOU A FREQUENT TRAVELER WHO FLIES  
MORE THAN 5 TIMES A YEAR?

- (A) YES   
(B) NO
- 

2.) DO YOU HAVE LODGING ACCOMMODATIONS  
PLANNED FOR YOUR TRIP?

- (A) YES   
(B) NO
- 

3.) IF WE ARE UNABLE TO FIND YOU TICKETS AT  
YOUR PRICE FOR THIS TRIP, WHAT WILL YOU DO?

- (A) DRIVE  (C) BUY TICKETS DIRECTLY  
FROM A MAJOR AIRLINE   
(B) NOT GO  (D) BUY TICKETS FROM AN  
ON-LINE TRAVEL SERVICE
- 

4.) DO YOU NEED HOTEL ACCOMMODATIONS FOR  
YOUR STAY IN YOUR DESTINATION CITY?

- (A) YES   
(B) NO

FIG. 5

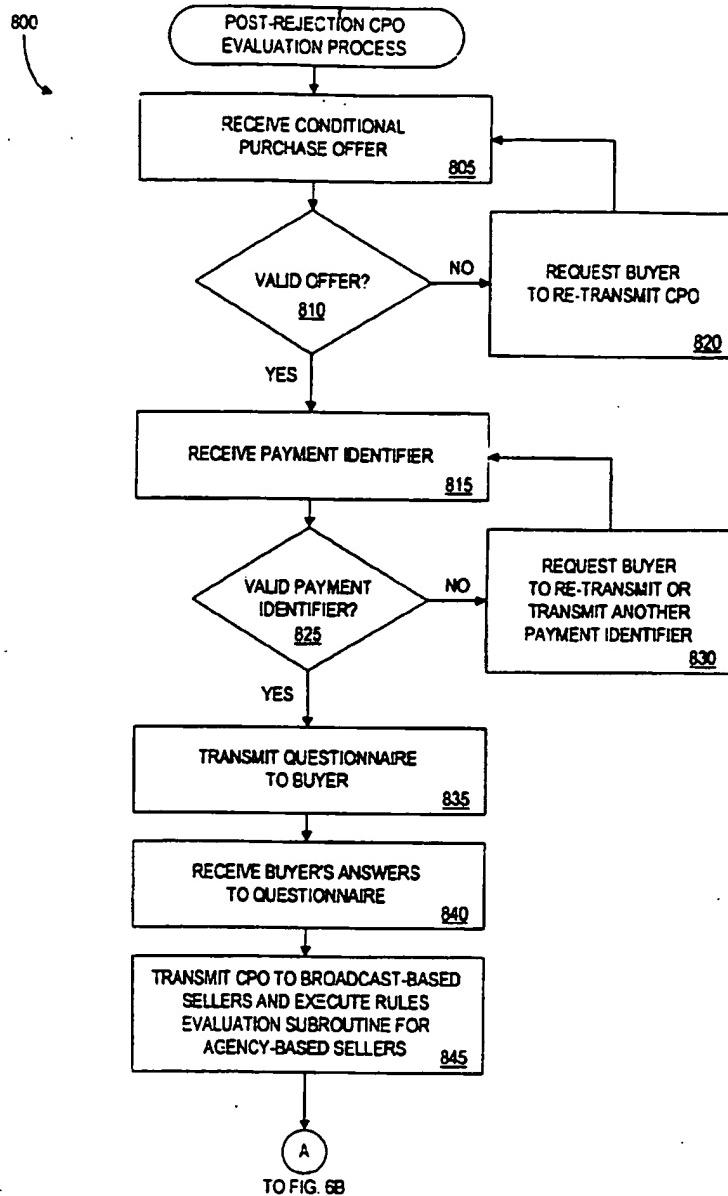


FIG. 6A

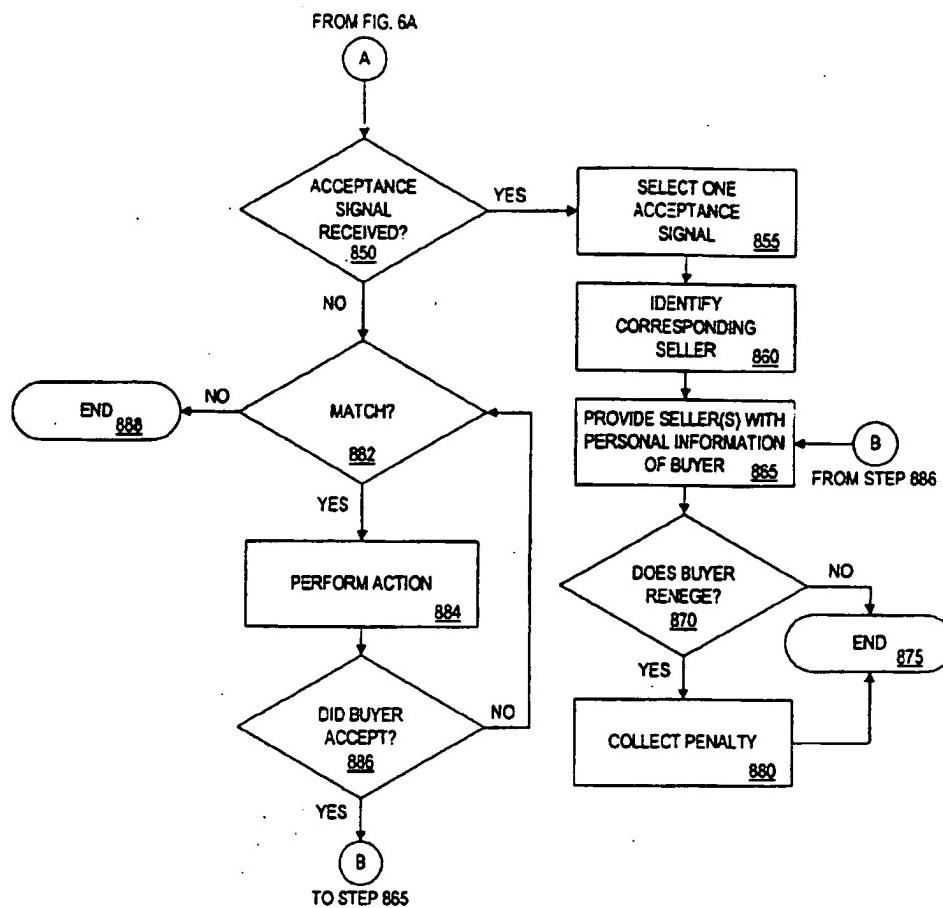


FIG. 6B

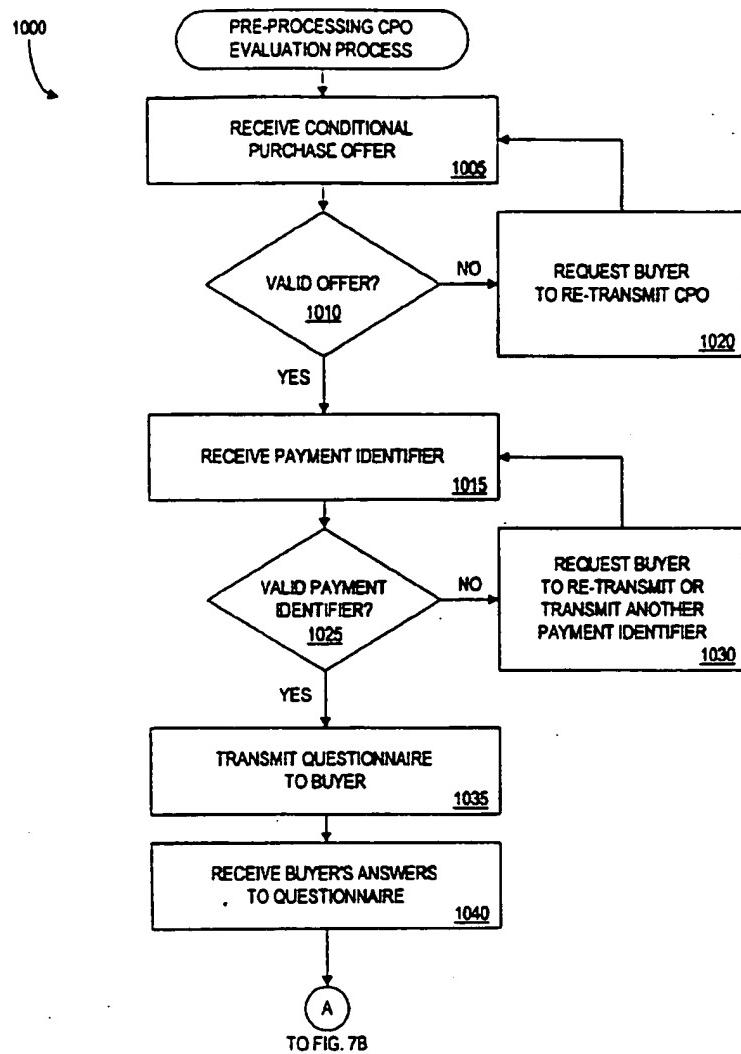


FIG. 7A

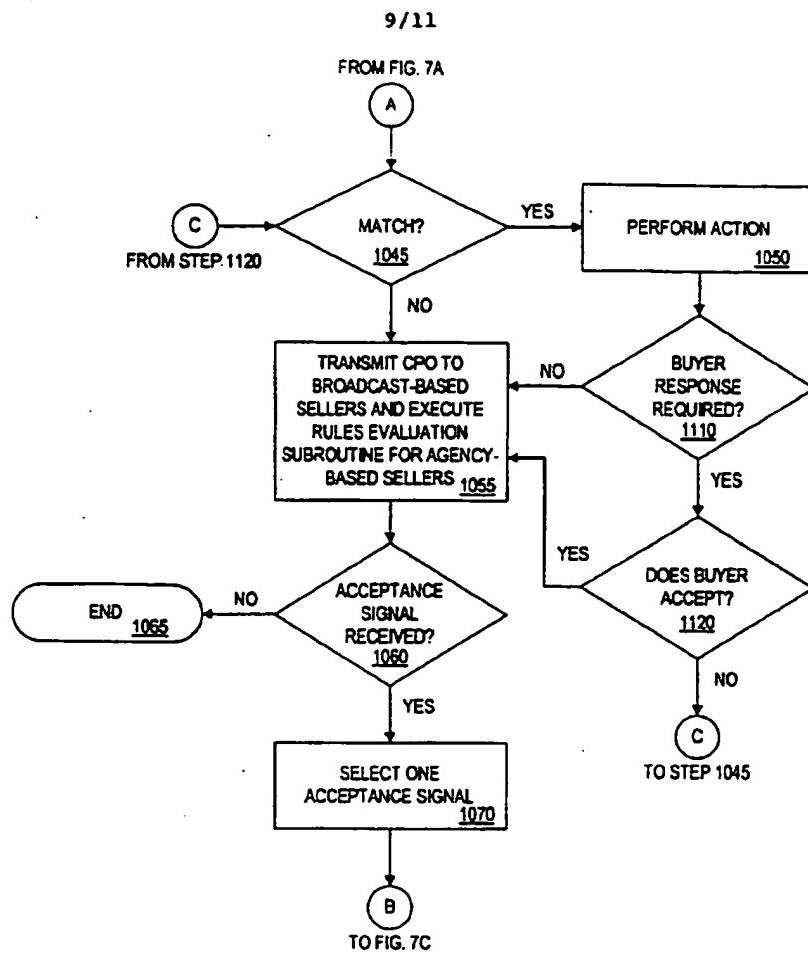


FIG. 7B

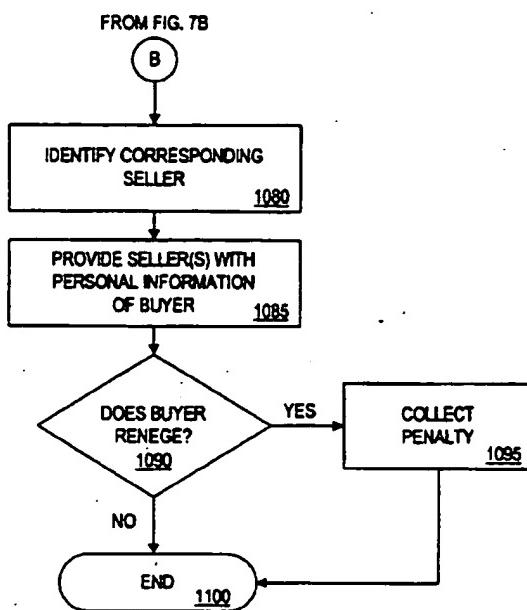


FIG. 7C

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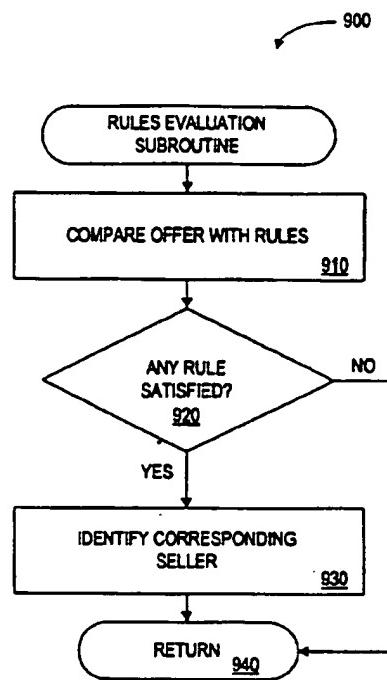


FIG. 8